

health care coverage need to know they have access to quality, affordable care. The bill addresses a number of Medicare inequities including cuts to hospitals, home health care providers, physical therapists, physicians, and skilled nursing facilities.

The Nebraska Hospital Association estimates that in this bill Nebraska hospitals would receive approximately \$56 million in additional revenue for one year and \$120 million over three years. The hospitals in my State need this funding to survive financially.

This legislation would have a tremendous impact on Nebraska's teaching hospitals. Teaching hospitals receive indirect medical education (IME) payments because they have higher patient care costs than non-teaching hospitals due to the extra costs incurred for teaching. The Balanced Budget Act, BBA, of 1997 cut these payments, and a provision in this bill would provide for additional relief. Nebraska has two academic medical centers—the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Creighton University Medical Center—and both would benefit from this legislation. Other hospitals in my State would also benefit including: Alegent Bergan Mercy in Omaha, Alegent Immanuel in Omaha, Bryan LGH Medical Center in Lincoln, St. Elizabeth Regional Medical Center in Lincoln, Good Samaritan in Kearney, and St. Francis in Grand Island.

The legislation also increases the Federal Medicaid disproportionate share hospital, DSH, allotment in extremely low-DSH States, such as Nebraska, from 1 percent to 3 percent of program costs. Even though the allotment percentage would be tripled, it is still far less than the national average. The DSH program provides relief to safety net hospitals that provide critical health care access to 42 million uninsured people in our country. Nebraska and 14 other States receive far less funding through the Medicaid DSH program per Medicaid and uninsured resident than the rest of the Nation and this lack of funding threatens the viability of many safety net hospitals.

A number of other important provisions are included that would help Nebraska's hospitals including: equalizing the standardized amount for rural and other urban hospitals; adjusting the wage index rate; increasing Medicare DSH payments to rural hospitals; extending the hold harmless provision for rural hospitals for outpatient services for another year; and improving the Critical Access Hospital program by allowing more flexibility in allocating swing and inpatient acute care beds.

In addition to providing much-needed relief to hospitals, the bill also eliminates the 15 percent reduction in home health payments. This cut would reduce payments to home health care providers in my State by nearly \$2 million per year. Nebraska providers cannot afford this cut. The legislation also recognizes the additional costs in-

curred by rural home health care providers and give them an additional 10 percent in payments.

I am also pleased that the bill eliminates the \$1500 outpatient therapy cap for two years. This arbitrary limit discriminates against Medicare beneficiaries who desperately need outpatient therapy to help them recuperate from surgery, a stroke, or other medical condition.

As I mentioned last month, we also need to rectify the physician payment cut. Under current law, Medicare's physician payment rates are projected to fall by 12 percent over the next three years. Nebraska physicians' losses due to the 2003–2005 cuts will total about \$63 million or \$17,230 per physician. This comes on top of a 5.4 percent payment cut which cost Nebraska doctors a total of \$12.9 million or about \$3,875 per physician in 2002.

I also spoke of the need to help skilled nursing facilities which are experiencing severe financial difficulty. If action isn't taken, Nebraska's facilities will lose \$28.48 per patient per day next year for a total of \$10 million.

Finally, I have spoken many times about providing fiscal relief to our States. This legislation also includes \$5 billion in fiscal relief to States by increasing the Federal Medicaid matching rate and by providing a temporary social services block grant. This provision, that I helped author, would give Governors some needed flexibility in assessing the needs of their States. States would be eligible for the Medicaid funding increase as long as the eligibility levels they had in place on January 2, 2002 are maintained. Unfortunately, the Nebraska Legislature made Medicaid eligibility cuts in the recent special session, and these cuts would prevent our State from receiving the full funding available. However, I crafted a provision that would allow Nebraska to receive the funding if they reinstate these Medicaid cuts in the future.

We need to pass this legislation before the session ends. Our Nation's seniors need to know that they can depend on the Medicare system for their health care needs. I look forward to working with my colleagues in addressing these important issues.●

IDAHO'S TEACHER OF THE YEAR

● Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I rise today to salute a very special teacher in my State, Patti Perry, who was recently named as Idaho's Teacher of the Year.

Patti Perry teaches first grade at Skyway Elementary School in Coeur d'Alene. She has taught in Coeur d'Alene for 30 years, and there are many people in the community who look back fondly on the lessons they learned from her. In fact, one of her former students said that she has "been in my heart since the first day of first grade." I'm sure this is a sentiment shared by many.

I come from a family of teachers, so I know how much a good teacher can affect the life of a student. What that teacher imparts in a classroom can stay with a student for the rest of his or her life. It's obvious that Mrs. Perry has had such an impact. She assesses every student individually and tailors her lessons to them. She is a leader in the school and a mentor to other teachers. And, most important of all, she inspires her students to strive for their highest possible performance, academically and otherwise.

It's not really a surprise that Mrs. Perry won this award. What is remarkable, though, is that she's Coeur d'Alene School District's third teacher in five years to be named as Idaho's Teacher of the Year. It's clear that the Coeur d'Alene District is doing something right. Kootenai County, which has Coeur d'Alene as its county seat, is one of the fastest growing counties in Idaho, and I suspect this might have something to do with the outstanding quality of schools in the county. I'm very proud of Mrs. Perry, and I'm also very proud of the Coeur d'Alene School District. They are both setting a great example for the rest of Idaho, and the rest of the Nation, to follow.●

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:04 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment to the Senate to the bill (H.R. 4546) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2003 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

At 2:33 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following joint resolution, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.J. Res. 124. A joint resolution making further continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 2003, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the House has agreed to the following resolution:

H. Res. 598. Resolution stating that the House has heard with profound sorrow of the death of the Honorable Paul D. Wellstone, a Senator from the State of Minnesota.

The message further announced that pursuant to section 491 of the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1098(c)), and upon recommendation for the Majority Leader, the Speaker reappoints the following member on the part of the House of Representatives to the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance for a 3-year term: Ms. Judith Flink of Morton Grove, Illinois.